

Tips on Mentoring a CTLT Cadet

You Can Use the Cadet Troop Leadership Training Program To Give Future Leaders a Realistic View of Platoon Responsibilities

by Captain Keith A. McKinley

Every summer, a unit can expect to receive one or more cadets under the CTLT (Cadet Troop Leadership Training) program. The CTLT program allows cadets to apply the principals and theories they have learned in an academic environment to situations and soldiers found in real world units. Cadets will either come from the USMA (United States Military Academy) or college ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) programs. Their time with active duty units is typically limited to one month. That does not give them a whole lot of time to learn the duties and responsibilities of a platoon leader.

To set a cadet up for success, a company commander should choose his *best* lieutenant to sponsor the future officer. Once a lieutenant receives this additional duty, this should be his top priority and all other duties should be secondary. The reasoning behind this is simple. Cadets are the future of the Officer Corps. The better the training leaders receive as cadets, the higher their performance level will be as lieutenants.

Before a cadet arrives at a unit, it is important for a lieutenant to establish a set training plan in which the future leader can actively participate. A checklist is one way for a sponsor to better organize the time a cadet will spend at the unit. Also, leaders need to prepare the unit for the arrival of the cadet. Many younger soldiers have never worked around cadets before, so it is a good idea for a unit to brief its personnel on how cadets should be treated during their stay at the unit.

Having mentored and trained CTLT cadets in the past, I have listed six areas I believe are important in the training of cadets during their short time with an active duty unit. They are the following:

1. Allow the cadet to become the *actual* platoon leader. The best way to learn the job of a platoon leader in the little amount of time a cadet has in the unit is to "throw him into the fire." Turn over command to him and let him go, remembering to give up only the control of your platoon but not the responsibility.

Be sure to expose the cadet to all administrative and tactical aspects of being a platoon leader (especially the negative ones). There is no bigger waste of a cadet's time than to follow a lieutenant around, doing nothing, or to become a lieutenant's personal secretary. He or she has sat in a classroom for years studying how to lead; now is his or her chance to apply these theories to real-life scenarios. In turn, the cadet will be able to fine-tune his or her leadership style.

2. Provide constant performance feedback. As stated above, a cadet should be given the *full effect* of being a platoon leader; however, a lieutenant just cannot let the future leader run wild and free in the battalion! This is where performance counseling is needed, at least daily. Remember that the cadet is conducting his or her own internal experiment with his or her leadership ability. Constant feedback is the only way a cadet will learn what works best and eliminate the action or style that is ineffective.

3. Teach combined arms. When I was a cadet, I remember memorizing all seven Battlefield Operating Systems (BOS) for an upcoming test without really understanding how these systems actually worked. CTLT is the best environment to show the cadet how we fight as a combined force. Take him on a ride around post and introduce him to some of the engineers, air defenders, logisticians, etc. Do not go into extreme depth on each system, but give the cadet an actual understanding of an abstract idea that he or she has learned in school.

4. Teach/instill unit history and pride. One way to do this is to take the cadet to your post museum. Guide him around and point out displays that apply to your specific unit. This will teach him or her the impact your unit had on history. Show the cadet that ours is a noble and honorable profession that has endured for years!

5. Introduce him/her to key players within the battalion. The cadet should not spend his whole time learning at

company level. Take the cadet up to battalion headquarters for introductions to the various staff sections (S1, S2, etc.), and ask section leaders to describe their function in the battalion and how they support the battalion's companies and platoons. Also, introduce the cadet to the specialty platoon leaders (scout platoon leader, mortar platoon leader, etc.) in the battalion, and have them explain their responsibilities within the battalion just as the staff did. Remember, the cadet needs only a *brief* description of these positions; the last thing a lieutenant wants to do is overwhelm a young cadet with information about the staff and specialty areas. Save this for when he or she becomes a lieutenant!

6. Get some work out of him or her. Remember that CTLT is not a one-month vacation for a cadet. He or she is there to work and learn. Use their time in the unit wisely to benefit the Army! I can guarantee that CTLT will be a miserable time for cadets, as well as lieutenants, if we waste their time and the Army's.

In summary, the training and experiences cadets receive during CTLT will remain with them for the rest of their career. Take the time and effort to show the cadet how a real unit operates and functions. Consider the time you spend now as an investment in the future leadership of the Army.

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